

'In the southeastern corner of the hangar, DH86 R.M.A. *Brisbane* was being serviced. Each undercarriage leg was supported on the twin-arms of mobile jacks since both port and starboard landing wheels had been removed. A wooden trestle was located about 2 meters forward of the port inboard engine, providing access for fuselage and cockpit window servicing. Flight Officer Fred Stevens was in the cockpit carrying out repairs to the radio. Apprentice Lance (Titch) Loney was engaged in cleaning the port inboard engine (which had had one of its magnetos removed for servicing) and engineer Ken Butler was detailed to check cylinder compression on all four engines. Within close proximity to the rear of the lower port mainplane, senior aircraftsman Bill Stone was working on the wing section from another aircraft.

Ken Butler was going about his job methodically and entered the cockpit to ensure that all engine ignition switches were in the 'off' position. He spoke briefly to Fred Stevens and pushed all four throttles fully forward before leaving the aircraft. Moving firstly to the starboard outboard engine, he pulled the propeller through its six compressions and then repeated the procedure on the starboard inboard engine before ducking under the nose to check the port inboard engine.

The Gipsy VI engine was not supposed to start on full throttle but on this one occasion assisted by the outside ambience, it coughed once and then sprang to life, roaring at full-bore on one magneto.

Ken jumped clear quickly, but the aircraft (which was supported on the mobile jacks — each having tricycle undergear) moved forward immediately, the metal propeller striking the wooden trestle, demolishing it and casting the residue through the fabric side of the fuselage.

'Titch' Loney kept his cool and tried desperately to short-circuit the port-side ignition by placing his arms across the six spark plugs, but was thrown backwards by the force of the electric shock, sustaining severe burns to both arms. Bill Stone ran forward from his workplace and attempted unsuccessfully to clamber over the trailing edge of the wing to reach the engine controls, while the aircraft, now turning in a radius toward the store, was gathering speed.

The commotion brought Arthur Baird and Ruth Trickett from their offices at the front northwestern corner of the hangar and just when catastrophe seemed imminent, the engine revs dropped, the noise subdued and the thrashing airscrew stopped. Fred Stevens, having extricated himself from the cramped position where he had been working on the radio located in the bulkhead, had closed down the throttle.

The direct cause of the near-disaster was a break in the magneto earthing lead inside the insulation which could not be seen merely on visual inspection — an indirect cause was the unusually high temperature of the day. When the throttle was opened, the interconnected magneto control caused the lead to stretch thus parting the broken wire ends. Closing the throttle reversed the control and contact was regained.'